DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 396 556 FL 023 914

AUTHOR Zuskin, Robin D.
TITLE Assessing L2 Sociolinguistic Competence: In Search of Support from Pragmatic Theories.
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 18p.; In: "Pragmatics and Language Learning," Volume 4. Selected papers presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Conference on Pragmatics and Language Learning (6th, Urbana, IL, April 2-4, 1992); see FL 023 905.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communicative Competence (Languages); Construct Validity; *Intercultural Communication; Language Proficiency; Language Research; Language Skills; *Language Tests; Linguistic Theory; *Pragmatics; Role Playing; *Semiotics; Simulation; Sociocultural Patterns; Sociolinguistics; Speech Acts; Testing Problems; Test Validity
IDENTIFIERS *Discourse Completion Test; *Politeness

ABSTRACT

Second language tests claiming to assess communicative competence are widespread, despite the vague nature of the construct. Sociolinguistic or intercultural competence is gradually gaining attention in the classroom, but testing has not kept pace, partly because of difficulty in defining the related skills. An opinion is that speech act theory and politeness theory, which focus on social aspects of communicative exchange while remaining true to pragmatic principles, can inform development of appropriate tests. Role playing and simulation are authentic means of testing overall communicative competence. The Discourse Completion Test (DCT), designed to elicit responses to problematic, contextually specific prompts as participants role play their responses, is currently under analysis as both a research tool and a testing option, as an alternative to the oral proficiency interview. The DCT capitalizes on the benefits of role playing and applies them to assessment. However, contextual aspects of DCTs must be better developed to convey more about interlocutors' relationship (status, positional identities). While the communicative objectives of the DCT are in line with pragmatic principles, the method needs to better reflect clear pragmatic criteria. Contains 42 references. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Pragmatics and Language Learning
Monograph Series, Vol. 4, 1993

Assessing L2 Sociolinguistic Competence: In Search of Support from Pragmatic Theories

Robin D. Zuskin
University of New Mexico

ED 396 556

With a heavy emphasis on communicative approaches to language teaching, many culturally-specific norms and rules of speech behavior in English have gradually found their way into second language classrooms. In spite of the overwhelming acceptance of emphasizing cross-cultural awareness in the teaching-learning process, it has remained an uncertain area in language testing. Such measurement devices have proven more or less dependable at evaluating the necessary grammatical competence of most nonnative speakers of English, but have yet to demonstrate sensitivity to sociocultural factors. Intercultural pragmatic success or "failure" (Thomas 1983) needs to be incorporated into the assessment of ESL/EFL students as well. Authentic means for pursuing this objective warrant the use of roleplays and simulations for testing overall communicative competence, which by definition, includes a sociolinguistic component. However, face validity alone is not satisfactory; construct validity should be the primary concern in test development. Accordingly, we must continue to work out the specifics of the psychological trait we wish to assess by examining the theoretical frameworks in use in this area--Speech Act theory and Politeness Theory. Their contributions and shortcomings to L2 testing in terms of measuring sociolinguistic abilities are discussed from the context-oriented perspective of semiotics.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Lawrence F Bachman
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

FL 023114

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

INTRODUCTION

Tests claiming to assess communicative competence are rampant despite the vague nature of this super construct. Along with the gradual acceptance of a componential framework accounting for successful and problematic talk (Canale & Swain 1980), sociolinguistic competence--otherwise known as sociocultural, intercultural, or pragmatic competence--is gradually gaining attention. Classroom teaching materials have begun to reflect this trend toward discussing situation perception skills (see Wolfson 1989) of register variation, status, social distance, and face-related issues while, ironically, most L2 assessment procedures remain aloof.

Part of the reason behind this procrastination stems from the task of measuring cognitive skills: in order to test a psychological trait, we must be able to clearly define and explain it. For test developers, construct validity must remain a priority. Before they can assess whether or not second language (L2) students know "when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about, with whom, where and in what manner" (Hymes' 1972 original definition of communicative competence), they had better be clear on how to view it in the grander scheme of things. Members of the applied linguistics community need to investigate if a proliferation of pragmatic theories has gotten out of hand (Zuengler 1992). It is my contention that theoretical reorganization is in order so that we avoid redundancy and overlap: a broader pragmatic framework which incorporates some of the sociocultural aspects necessary to explain and predict human communication. This umbrella perspective is best understood visually (Fig. 1):

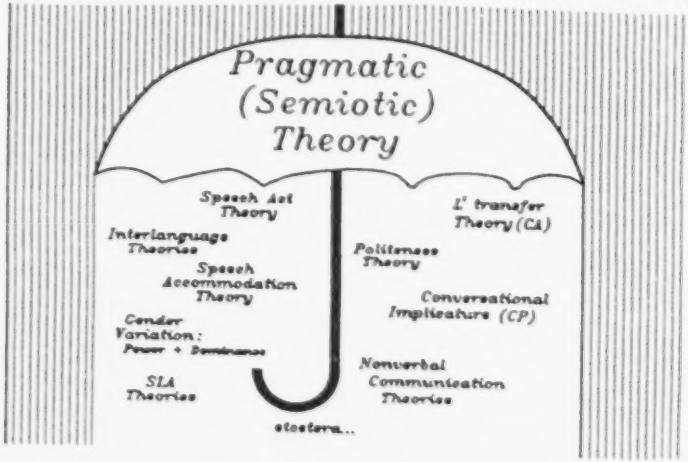

Figure 1: The pragmatic umbrella

As this diagram illustrates, several theoretical positions contribute to our understanding of the message exchange process in face-to-face communication. The problem is that we have a tendency to limit or confine the power of our theory in order to explain a specific aspect of this process. In the area of assessing first language sociolinguistic transfer--the carry-over of sociocultural norms and implicit behavioral guidelines during second language acquisition and interlanguage processes--a near blind acceptance of two prototypical pragmatic theories has emerged in the literature: *Speech Act Theory* and *Politeness Theory*. When used for L2 assessment objectives, these frameworks determine testing criteria. Sensitivity to illocutionary force of various speech acts or to appropriate politeness norms during facework have frequently served in this role. Both theories focus on social aspects of communicative exchanges while remaining true to pragmatic principles. However, neither framework in isolation can handle the entire explanatory process; along with other problems, an understanding of the interactional nature of psycholinguistic processing remains weak. Only a return to the original source--*Semiotic Theory*--can permit a cognitive view of social interaction with sufficient muscle.

Semiotic or Broad Pragmatic Theory

Semiotics, or the study of signs, sign systems and the meaning generated when such systems are translated, boasts as its protypical example the study of language (linguistics). A prominent feature of semiotic analyses of discourse involves examining icons, indexes and symbols in terms of the networks or relationships in which they occur (context) and by so doing, arriving at an interpretation of the given text. The key to this task of producing meaning from such signs lies in the inclusion of the whole system and its complex networking with other systems. Charles Sanders Pierce, in his philosophical writings on the sorts of logical reasoning man uses to function in his environment, equates semiotics with a term he coined, *Pragmatics*, or the process of inference generation and interpretation (Oller 1989). Consequently, semantics (at the content level) is designated as the organizer of the sign systems, while pragmatics (at the relationship level) is assigned to the actual interpretation of such systems by individuals.

Pierce suggests that only three types of reasoning are available to the human mind: the first involves drawing inferences based on experiential, sensory perceptions of a physical sort (**Abduction-iconic signs**); the second type relies on probability and experimentation via experience and includes affective and kinesic information exchanges (**Induction-indexical signs**); the third type differs from abduction and induction in its lack of reference to time and space--here we have the realm of theory and universal rules (**Deduction-symbolic signs**). The pivotal

point of all three reasoning processes is the world of experience and all logical conclusions must be verified by this critical feature (Oller 1991; 1992). Experience (social and cognitive) grounds all of our perceptions which are in turn, filtered through language; consequently context is the primary ingredient of discourse analysis.

How can this trichotomy account for sociolinguistic competence? The socialized, conventional parts of language and the struggle for normative conformity and consensus clearly demand inductive reasoning. For example, appropriate sensitivity to politeness norms is acquired through experimenting and hypothesizing; after a few bad experiences with violating these norms, we draw inferences that this specific behavior in this specific time and place must not be acceptable to members of our cultural community. Another example involves gestures and other paralinguistic communicative acts. Gestures "guide us in the way we manage and negotiate relations with things, events, and persons in our environment" (Oller 1991, p 5). Thus, the idea that meanings of signed expressions are socially recognized because they develop through interpretations conveyed in their contexts and circumstances, is in fact a social extension of semiotic philosophy (see Halliday & Hassan 1989; Hodge & Kress 1988). By infusing a broad pragmatic framework with the face-to-face concerns of human interaction (i.e., speech community conventions and face needs), we see how comfortably certain communication models fit within this powerful structure. At the same time, we begin to understand how comparatively weak Speech Act Theory and Politeness Theory appear when used in isolation. Even if a psycholinguistic support mechanism could be arranged, the relationship with other sign systems (i.e., kinesic, prosodic) remain disconnected.

Speech Act Theory

Speech Act Theory (Austin 1962; Searle 1969) classifies verbal messages according to their communicative function. A triad of these basic categories include: a *locutionary act* or the act of saying something in quotable, literal terms (he said to "Call back later"); an *illocutionary act* or the act identified by the statement which conveys the force or function of the utterance--the speaker's intended meaning (I suggested, urged or ordered them to call back later); and a *perlocutionary act* or the act performed as a result of the utterance in terms of a commentary from the speaker's perspective--what the hearer understands from the utterance (he persuaded us to call back later).

Specifically, Searle (1975) suggests that the *illocutionary force* of an utterance consists of two parts, namely a proposition and a force or function-indicating device (e.g., word order, mood of the verb, punctuation, etc..). So that a

statement can be converted into a question or an emotional command simply by applying one or a combination of these devices. The rationale underlying this maneuver is that by altering the force of a message, its interpretation changes. This distinction between literal and implied force represents the star feature of Speech Act Theory and, some claim, the key to understanding indirect speech acts.

The question still remains as to how the speaker's intentions are actually inferred by the hearer. If reviewed from a semiotic, Piercian perspective this psycholinguistic cavity can be filled. Since each participant comes into the speech scenario with a set of communal and personal experiences about two sets of expected behavior norms--linguistic and cultural--meanings of messages will be inferred according to this backdrop. But it must be pointed out that the text itself also contributes to this comprehension process. So that a web of indirect inferences (Oller and Jonz, In press, p.23) are drawn from three sources--the speaker, the hearer and their relationship with the text itself--although not as simply and direct as Searle seems to suggest (Figure 2) .

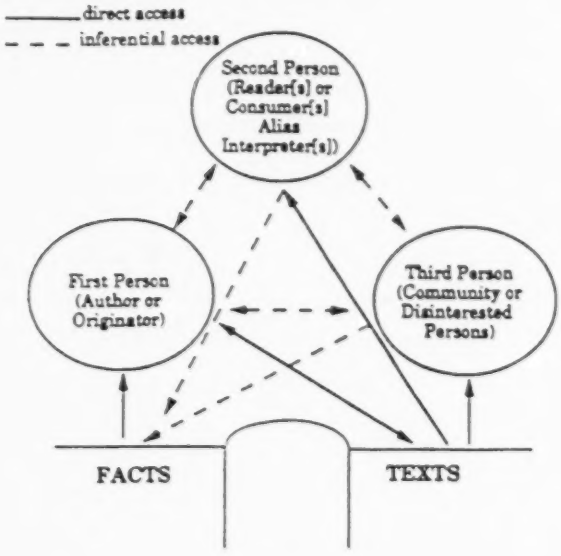

FIG. 2: Speech Act Theory via a semiotic exchange of information and intentions.
From *Cloze and Coherence* by J.W. Oller and J. Jonz (In press)

Should these multi-directional interpretations lack coherence by virtue of an incomplete triad, successful communication cannot occur; an unexpected ill-formedness or inappropriateness to the situation at hand, in effect, renders a message incomprehensible or uninterpretable. Sociocultural differences come into play because a common "world of experience" is essential for effective "pragmatic mapping" between the facts (what we know to be true) and representations of those facts (Oller 1992). This relationship assures that a sense of logical connectedness and consistency escort the interpretation process so that responses are relevant and appropriate; it also generates communicative breakdown if expectations lack mutuality. Flowerdew (1990) views this lack of coherence as reflective of the discrete point discourse analysis approach underlying Speech Act Theory. Since it fails to explain why the individual linguistic acts do not contribute to the total meaning of the conversation, its utility is questionable. A possible reason for this disappointment is because illocutionary forces may in fact "spread over a number of utterances and that one utterance may share more than one force" (Flowerdew, p 94) so that separating speech acts into distinct, isolated units does not make sense. By denying this interdependent state of affairs, Speech Act Theory can only generate a set of vaguely related functions or tasks such as in a functional-notional syllabus. Without some linguistic glue, an incomplete relationship persists between verbal acts and highly contextualized social interactions. Ironically, despite this and other serious shortcomings (i.e., the belief that speech acts can be finitely numbered or that there exists no means for explaining nonverbal speech acts), researchers in a wide spectrum of disciplines from linguistics to sociology to anthropology to communication have placed their trust in Austin and Searle's philosophical concepts.

Politeness Theory

Brown and Levinson's chapter on politeness phenomena (1978) constitutes an example of the great impact a single publication can have on the linguistic academic community. Their notion of "face-threatening acts" (FTAs) needs to be examined more closely however. It seems that although it may offer some insights into social behavior norms (Tracy 1990), this theoretical model conveys a rather incomplete picture of communication via language.

Brown and Levinson's innovative theory stipulates that in order to predict the politeness strategy of choice, two criteria must be addressed: (1) whether the illocutionary act will be **on record** (state intentions clearly, e.g., "I promise I'll clean my room") or **off record** (ambiguous, more indirect statements of intention, e.g., "Didn't I tell you I would clean my room?", rhetorical questions, metaphor, irony, understatement, etc.); and (2) in the latter situation where redressive action

is expected, if **positive face** needs (solidarity) vs. **negative face** needs (freedom from impeded action) require attention. Following, but by no means limited to Grice's (1975) cue, Brown and Levinson (1978 p 64-65) concede that it is "mutual knowledge" that drives their strategic model. But where Grice's *Cooperative Principle* focuses on mutual understanding, Politeness Theory becomes counterbalanced by certain protective measures in a frame loaded with risk and danger. Speech participants need defensive equipment to safely engage in conversation. In short, Politeness Theory prioritizes social pressures in explaining verbal interaction. These social factors, when combined under certain circumstances, determine the specific choice and sequencing of conversational strategy.

Evidence for the Politeness Theory lies in its generalizability across cultures. Through much cross-cultural empirical data (e.g., Olshtain & Cohen 1983; Blum-Kulka et al. 1989; Kitao 1990; Beebe & Takahashi 1989), it appears that politeness may be a universal occurrence. Accordingly, this paradigm has won much respect among sociolinguists. Despite the support it has received, Politeness Theory cannot account for all dimensions of linguistic functions; some communicative acts may not even involve facework such as intrapersonal message exchanges. Cognitive processing, particularly from an interlanguage perspective (Gass & Varonis 1991), also remains a mystery when Politeness Theory is solely applied.

Politeness Theory , in summary, stands on firm ground, although it lacks the amount of power for which it originally strived. It must be viewed under a pragmatic umbrella in order to gather adequate support for carrying out its theoretical responsibilities. Because it attempts to forecast linguistic behavior from social experiences, it remains pragmatically sound. It helps to explain some of the illocutionary force variability, particularly indirect speech acts--but not all of it. A gap remains where social needs extend beyond those of face, where kinesic or prosodic channels interact with speech or where Western socialization objectives may not account for the notion of face cross-culturally (Gu 1990; Matsumoto 1988).

Pragmatic theories are the only ones capable of accounting for the situated aspect of language use; things get very messy due to a collage of interacting variables like power hierarchies, social distance, gender subcultures, age and the like, PLUS factors like native speaker negotiation/accommodation patterns, L2 interlanguage development, individual variation (i.e., personality, empathy) and others relevant to the translation of semiotic material. A broad version of pragmatic theory welcomes these variables since the context itself provides sufficient information for the work of making meaning. In other words, by highlighting the unique sociocultural baggage each interlocutor brings to the

message exchange forum and how it contributes to its interpretation in that particular "strip of activity", we can arrive at a more accurate response to Goffman's (1974) perceptive question: *What's going on in this frame?* A semiotic perspective actually authorizes us to look at each communicative encounter on a case-by-case basis: within a particular situation we find particular interactants who are influenced by particular cultures and social communities to convey and interpret verbal and nonverbal discourse in particular ways.

Testing L2 Sociolinguistic Skills

In the area of L2 measurement, sociolinguistic competence has influenced various testing paradigms. Bachman's (1990) popular multi-dimensional framework of communicative competence, for example, divides this grand ability into two principle skill subcategories: *Organizational Competence* (grammatical competence and textual competence), and *Pragmatic Competence* (illocutionary competence and sociolingusitic competence). Bachman (p 90) defines the latter as "the knowledge of the pragmatic conventions for performing acceptable language functions and...the knowledge of the sociolinguistic conventions for performing language functions appropriately in a given context." Bachman also includes a psycholinguistic thread to his model, an innovative addition to many pragmatic theories. Yet no explanation about how these components interact with one another has been tendered. Can someone be sociolinguistically competent without having first reached a certain level of grammatical ability? How much of sociolinguistic competence depends on discourse cohesion and organization? Moreover, where do alternate communication modalities such as intonation, gestures and facial expressions fit in? These are issues that need empirical attention before any L2 student is deemed sociolinguistically competent or not. These are issues which tests claiming to assess overall communicative competence cannot ignore. Shohamy (1984) explains the urgency of developing this type of assessment tool:

> Till today, sociolinguistic proficiency has rarely been tested. Most language tests still focus on linguistic aspects as the major criteria for test construction. Overlooking the state of the art in knowing what a language means today, implies the construction of tests which fail to tap the construct of language proficiency in its full and complete definition...The construction of such tests will involve imposing rigorous measurement criteria to convert this sociolinguistic information into tests of sociolinguistic proficiency. (p.161)

Validity & Roleplaying: The Discourse Completion Test

Endeavors to assess communicative competence, or at least the portion of that competence that language tests have successfully been able to tap (i.e., proficiency), have more recently included a sociolinguistic component. As more and more L2 curricula begin to include the various ingredients of linguistically realized politeness norms (e.g., register variation as dictated by perceived status of interlocutors, by sensitivity to situational formality and the face needs of interlocutors) as well as other socio-context dependent linguistic phenomena, the development of a valid process of evaluation becomes imperative. One procedure which relies on a roleplay format is currently under analysis both as a linguistic research tool and as a candidate for a supplementary position in tests claiming to assess overall communicative competence (i.e., an alternative to oral proficiency interviews).

The Discourse Completion Test (DCT) elicits responses to problematic, contextually-specific prompts as participants, in writing or orally, roleplay their responses. It is somewhat analogous to a cloze test where the blank is beyond the one-word level and instead begs for an extended, pragmatic level response. Both the cloze and DCT task parallel one another in terms of tapping inferencing skills and sensitivity to coherence of text.

The origin of this sociolinguistic instrument (Blum-Kulka 1982) promotes a written interaction with often more than one rejoinder between the respondent and a hypothetical character in the second person. In other words, the respondent of the DCT was originally meant to write a least two separate utterances. The DCT has evolved gradually over the past decade into several different modified versions, including some using a third person perspective, many requiring only a one-utterance written response from subjects, some which allow for oral response and, more recently, an extended interaction nearing an oral interview-like character. Oral responses, furthermore, have been videotaped for later assessment or rated by trained NS judges immediately upon oral performance (see Cohen & Olshtain 1991). All the various DCT adaptations which have been studied share a common characteristic: they have all relied on a textual description of a particular situation which requires examinees to *act as if* by demonstrating their skills of empathetic roleplay acting.

What is roleplaying? From the outset, some clarification of this pedagogical strategy is needed. By dissecting this verbal compound, we find that when students assume a *role*, they take on a part (either their own or someone else's) in a specific situation. *Play* means that this role is performed in a safe environment so as to promote creativity and motivation while reducing stress and anxiety (Ladousse 1987). This tactic has been used in L2 classrooms for quite

some time, especially during the audio-lingual period. However, communicative teaching principles have converted a controlled, scripted roleplay into a more free, improvisational technique. The DCT capitalizes on the proven benefits that this methodology has demonstrated in the teaching arena (Bardovi-Harlig et al. 1991) and applies them to the work of assessment. It is very important to keep in mind that despite its popularity among instructors, teaching and testing have different criteria because of their different objectives.

From a semiotic approach, however, context-related revisions of the DCT are absolutely necessary. Despite their well-meaning inclusion of situationally-specific discourse frames, the schematic information with which DCT researchers have supplied examinees does not convey enough about the relationship (e.g., status, positional identities) between the speaker and hearer. Furthermore, the unextended feature of these examples illustrates the unlikelihood of their occurrence in natural discourse. Students do not know enough about the characters they are role-playing nor about their conversational partners. The contextual tapestry is not complete; yet, NNSs are supposed to respond as if it were. The use of hypothetical simulations depends on an abundance of schema if appropriateness intuitions are to be stimulated. Since we can only infer examinee's underlying sociocultural competence based on their performance in the role-play, the script must provide for a more effective conveyance of the relationship between the characters. The latest studies on roleplay effectiveness as an evaluation tool indicate that communicative performance is highly situation specific, so that the context of each scenario can actually affect examinees' speech act strategies (Cohen & Olshtain 1991). Consequently, while social, cultural and personal factors influence speech act realization choices among NNS examinees, situation outweighs these others. This point should be incorporated into the DCT design.

The following role-play prompt exemplifies the DCT as a data elicitation instrument currently used in the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP). This collaborative study examines the production of NNS requests and apologies across 7 linguistic cultures using a strictly third person type of roleplay (see Blum-Kulka et al. 1989). The DCT item (1) represents one of the more popular DCT formats: :

At the professor's office
A student has borrowed a book from her professor,
which she promised to return.
Professor: Ann, I hope you brought the book I lent you.
Ann: _____
Professor: OK, but please remember it next week.

Other variations (Beebe et al.) replace the student's name with "you" in the above. Rintell & Mitchell (1989) suggests removing the sandwich approach by switching the blank line of dialogue to the end of the critical incident description. The teacher-student interaction conveyed above would be modified into a more cohesive prompt as in the following example (2):

> Ann, a student at the university, borrowed her professor's book last week. She promised to return it today in class but is not finished using it. She would like to borrow the book a few more days. Imagine you are Ann. What would you say to your professor to get an extension on the book loan?
>
> YOU:_____

Regardless of the DCT prompt format used, some unavoidable pragmatic problems prevail. Despite their well-meaning inclusion of situationally-specific discourse frames, the test's original authors seem more concerned with *co-textual* clues than with *contextual* ones. The schematic information with which they have supplied examinees does not convey enough about the relationship (e.g., status, social distance) between the speaker and hearer. Students do not know enough about their hypothetical conversational partners to determine the degree of imposition of the FTA. The use of hypothetical simulations depends on an abundance of schema if appropriateness intuitions are to be stimulated; there exists a camouflage of communicative intent which hides a lack of real-life applicability. Since we can only infer examinee's underlying sociolinguistic competence based on their performance in the role-play, the script must provide for a more effective conveyance of the relationship between the characters. Offering a preliminary introduction of the two basic characters and then retaining those two speech participants throughout the 16 different situations might be helpful.

This roleplaying methodology conveys a high degree of *face validity* (Clark 1978). Few test developers would question this, although some have doubted the realistic nature of using *written* roleplays for speech that is normally produced in an oral fashion (Cohen & Olshtain 1991). Face validity or authenticity of communicative competence is one of the major issues confronting test developers today. The appearance of a test can actually affect test performance if examinees perceive the test to be measuring what they expect it to measure even though the test may not tap the targeted psychological construct.

As discrete point tests have become a near taboo in the field of language testing development (although in practice they remain popular), researchers are

determined to produce a more holistic, natural means of evaluation. But does that criterion necessarily translate into direct testing? The overlap or area of gray that results when attempting to delineate trait from method is problematic due to the arbitrary cut-off point we set in our validation work (e.g., when do the roleplay prompts cross over from method into the category of trait?); and it may be this problem which complicates our interpretation of test statistics (Stevenson 1981).

Nevertheless, Clark (1978) defends direct tests as advantageous because ethnographic observation is simply too impractical as a systematic testing tool. Authenticating opportunities for communicative interaction within the limits of testing time and facilities means that real life situations are approximated to the greatest extent possible. Wesche (1985) supports the need for direct testing since predictive validity is almost guaranteed; the inferred skills demonstrated during the test can be extended to real life language use with some degree of confidence since the test supposedly mirrors such use. But most of these kinds of claims lack empirical support, as we see that rationalization does not equal validation. The inherent artificiality despite attempts to appear natural stems from a lack of puposefulness and contextualization (Raffaldini 1981). For example, when communicative functions are targeted as if they occur in isolation from others, when prosodic and kinesic cues are awkwardly missing or when the relationships between interlocutors are not clarified for examinees, pragmatic mapping is made difficult if not impossible.

With all the inexact cognitive probing test developers must contend with, face validity seems, ironically, to provide a way to appease various audiences: students, administrators, teachers, etc. The facade is effective only until students are misplaced in programs or their problems are misdiagnosed. Face validity can be a plus only after true construct validity has been established. Some questions affecting the construct validity of roleplays include: *Do role plays elicit opportunities for examinees to generate evidence of their native-like ability in spoken discourse? Do they provide enough context to students so that a hypothetical response can be gleaned from students' real experiences? Or better yet, do the discourse prompts promote appropriate and polite responses by providing students with culturally-specific discourse signals that native-speakers would recognize immediately?* If any of these questions cannot be answered with conviction, it is perhaps due to the weakness of the theories from which roleplay and interview tools gather support.

CONCLUSION

The communicative objectives of the DCT appear quite in line with pragmatic principles; yet, because its developers have not specifically admitted that a communicative assessment strategy is in fact one based on broad pragmatic theory, they can only muster a vague notion of its validity. The DCT could be revised, however, in correlation with clear pragmatic criteria. Its estrangement from an empirically-supported theory of language--one which is not plagued with criticisms (e.g., Speech Act Theory) or one which can account for more than mere sociolinguistic phenomena (e.g, Politeness Theory)--hinders its utility as a tool for measuring sociocultural competence. Much work remains in terms of clarifying specific construct validity requirements of roleplays, both written and oral. Only as more empirical studies produce evidence beyond the anecdotal and intuitive level, can we anticipate espousing that various roleplay techniques indeed measure what they purport to measure.

While a written description of a scenario can certainly provide examinees with numerous contextual cues, to fully enable them to respond appropriately, we must enrich this context with more than mere verbal signs. As Semiotic Theory explains, nonverbal cues often carry much of the affective and sociocultural message (Oller 1992; Feldman et al 1991). The inclusion of time, moreover, makes expression of signs via video or film "more complete" or more accurate in specifying a particular event than most other textual formats (Korac 1988). Thus, why not reinforce the text itself with some alternative modes of communication such as gesture and prosody? The same critical incident that was originally read by participants can then be interpreted in gestures and in sensory-motor modalities in addition to pure linguistic representations. This approach considers the variation of learning styles and culturally-based inferencing processes among L2 students. Moreover, if we want to know how well examinees can use the elements of language in real-life communication, we must offer them a testing forum which not only simulates real-life communication, but which provides meaningful contexts where interaction with interlocutors or with other examinees enhances successful outcomes.

Future Research

For this reason, a video version of the DCT has been produced by this writer which conveys each situation audio-visually. Before each 10-30 second critical incident appears on the video monitor, a brief preamble is provided. Examinees

can read and listen to the information regarding character roles and relationships as they are "set up" (i.e., given a communicative objective) for the elicitation of one of four speech acts: apology, request, refusal or complaint. They are finally asked to respond as if they were actually in the particular context of the character they *see and hear* on the screen. Responses can be videotaped or, if time and money constraints do not permit, written questionnaires used in the traditional DCT can be substituted. Research on this and other methodological variations of the DCT are in demand before we can confidently suggest its adoption for use (e.g., Rintell & Mitchell 1989; Cohen & Olshtain 1991; Cohen in press).

In the L2 pedagogical niche known as communicative testing, the rationale for revising our theoretical model is twofold: first, we absolutely need to establish construct validity to justify psycholinguistic measurement instruments; second, we need to collectively work toward understanding human communication so that refinement of linguistic theories can follow. In our efforts to link theory to L2 teaching and testing practices, we must work toward validation of our pragmatic framework--a model which accounts for natural, non-ideal discourse in a variety of sociocultural contexts. In so doing, we need to recycle some good ideas, throw out those lacking support and reorganize for effectiveness of explanation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. John Oller for his encouragement to make a contribution to the applied linguistics community. I also owe a great amount of gratitude to Dr. Andrew Cohen for his priceless feedback on my research in this area. Finally, I would like to acknowledge The University of New Mexico Graduate Student Association and the Linguistics Graduate Student Organization for the financial assistance I received in order to attend this conference.

THE AUTHOR

Robin Zuskin is a doctoral student in the Educational Linguistics Ph.D. program at the University of New Mexico

REFERENCES

Austin, M. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

Bachman, Lyle F. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language testing*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

Bardovi-Harlig, K. Hartford, K., Mahan-Taylor, R., Morgan, M. and Reynolds, D. (1991). Developing pragmatic awareness: Closing the conversation. ELT Journal, 45, 4-15.

Beebe, L. and Takahashi T. (1989). Sociolinguistic variation in face-threatening speech acts. Chastisement and disagreement. In M. Eisenstein (Ed.), *The dynamic interlanguage* (pp.199-218). New York: Plenum Press.

Beebe, L., Takahashi, T, and Uliss-Weltz. (1990). Pragmatic transfer in ESL refusals. In R. Scarcella, . Andersen & S. Krashen (Eds.), *Developing communicative competence in a second language* (pp 55-74). New York: Newbury House.

Blum-Kulka, Shoshana. (1982). Learning how to say what you mean in a second language: A study of speech act performance of Hebrew as a second language. *Applied Linguistics*, 3, 29-59.

Blum-Kulka, Shoshana, House, Juliane and Kasper, Gabriele. (1989). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Co.

Brown, Penelope and Levinson, Stephen. (1978). Universals in language use: Politeness phenomena. In E. Goody (Ed.), *Questions and politeness: Strategies in social interaction* (pp.56-289). Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press.

Canale, Michael and Swain, Merrill. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1, 1-47.

Clark, John D. (1978). *Direct testing of speaking proficiency: Theory and application*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

Cohen, Andrew and Olshtain, Elite. (1991). Researching the production of speech acts. Paper presented at the Conference on Theory, Construction and Methodology in Second Language Acquisition Research, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, Oct. 4-6.

Cohen, Andrew (in press). *Testing language ability in the classroom, 2nd ed.* Boston, MA: Newbury House/Heinle & Heinle.

Feldman, R. Philloppot, P. and Custrini, R. (1991). Social competence and nonverbal behavior, In R. Feldman & B. Rimé (Eds.), *Fundamentals of nonverbal behavior*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Flowerdew, John. (1990). Problems of speech act theory from an applied perspective. *Language Learning*, 40, 79-105.

Gass, S. and Varonis E. (1991). Miscommunication in nonnative speaker discourse. In N. Coupland, H. Giles and J. Weiman (Eds.), *Miscommunication and problematic talk* (pp.121-145). Newbury Park: Sage.

Goffman, Erving. (1974). *Frame analysis*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press.

Grice, H.P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics vol. 3: Speech acts*. New York: Academic Press.

Gu, Yuengo. (1990). Politeness phenomena in modern Chinese. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 14, 237-257.

Halliday, M.A.K. and Hassan, R. (1989). *Language, context and text: Aspects of language in a social-semiotic perspective*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

Hodge, R. and Kress Gunther. (1988). *Social semiotics*. Cambridge, Polity Press.

Hymes, Dell. (1972). On communicative competence. In J.B. Pride and J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics* (pp 269-293). Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Kitao, Kenji. (1990). A study of Japanese and American perceptions of politeness in requests. Doshisha; *Studies in English*, 50, 178-210.

Korac, N. (1988). Functional, cognitive and semiotic factors in the development of audiovisual comprehension. *Educational Communications and Technology Journal*, 36, 67-91.

Ladousse, G.P. (1987). *Roleplay*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Oller, John W. (1979). *Language tests at school*. New York: Longman.

Oller, John W. (Ed.) (1989). *Language and experience: Classic pragmatism*. Lanham, MD: Univ. Press of America.

Oller, John W. (1991). Language testing research: Lessons applied to LEP students and programs. Paper presented at the National Research Symposium on Limited English Proficient Students' Issues: Focus on Evaluation and Measurement, Washington, D.C., Sept. 4-6.

Oller, John W. (1992). Testing literacy and related language skills: Parts I and II. In R. Walker, S. Rattanavich & J. Oller (Eds.), *Teaching all the children to read* (pp 55-94). Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Oller, John W. and Jonz, Jon. (in press). *Cloze and coherence* (pp 1-34).

Olshtain, E. and Cohen, A. (1983). Apology: A speech act set. In N. Wolfson and E. Judd (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and language acquisition* (pp18-35). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Matsumoto, Yoshiko. (1988). Reexamination of the universality of face: Politeness phenomena in Japanese. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 12, 403-426.

Raffaldini, T. (1988). The use of situation tests as measures of communicative ability. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 10, 197-216.

Rintell, E. and Mitchell, C. (1989). Studying resquests and apologies: Inquiry into method. In S. Blum-Kulka, J. House & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Crosscultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies* (pp 248-272). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Co.

Searle, John R. (1969). *An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Searle, J.R. (1975). Indirect speech acts. In P. Cole and J. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics: vol 3. speech acts* (pp 59-82). New York: Academic Press.

Shohamy, E. (1984). Input and output in language testing. In T. Culhane, C. Bradley and D.Stevenson (Eds.), *Occasional papers: Practice and problems in language testing*. Essex, UK: Dept. of Language and Linguistics, Univ. of Essex.

Stevenson, D. (1981). Beyond faith and face validity: The multitrait-multimethod matrix and the convergent and discriminant validity of oral proficiency tests. In A. Palmer, P. Groot and G. Trosper (Eds.), *The construct validation of tests of communicative competence* (pp 37-61). Washington, DC: TESOL.

Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics*, 4, 91-112.

Tracy, Karen. (1990). The many faces of facework. In H. Giles and W. Robinson (Eds.), *Handbook of language and social psychology* (209-226). Chichester, England: John Wiley & Sons.

Wesche, M. (1985). Introduction in P. Hauptan, R. LeBlanc & M. Wesche (Eds.), *Second language performance testing* (pp 1-2). Ottowa, Canada: Univ. of Ottowa.

Wolfson, Nessa. (1989). *Perspectives: Sociolinguistics and TESOL*. New York: Newbury House.

Zuengler, Jane. (1992). Explaining NS-NNS interactions: Too many theories, or too few? American Association of Applied Linguistics 14th Annual Meeting, Seattle, WA, Feb. 28-March 2.